

Nor was it only the old who found in this
quiet child a
listener:

There were fond girls that took me to their
side

To tell the story how their lovers died.

In the same way, with the same already
eager human
interest, he picked acquaintance with lonely
shepherds on
Aldborough Heath, and with smugglers
down the coast.
If Crabbe's schooling was scanty and his
culture never
wide, he early learnt tilings that books could
never have
taught him,

And all that boys acquire whom. men.
neglect.

Next followed apprenticeship to a series of
surgeons; a

rough experience, apt to include helping the
surgeon's

ploughboy at odd moments. Then, at
seventeen, came

romance. He fell in love with Sarah Elmy.

The poems

he addressed 'To Mira seem starchy and
sickly enough to

modern taste; it only shows how rash it is
to accuse

writers of 'insincerity'. Seldom has love
proved truer.

To win her he battled for twelve years in a
harder fight

even than Dorothy Osborne, against
discouragement,

poverty, and debt. Twice he tried to make
his way in

London. His first attempt was in 1776-7, as
a surgeon;

but he was too poor to pay for proper
teaching, and his

efforts at self-help led to little result—except
that his land-

lady, finding he had a dead baby in his
cupboard, became

convinced that he had dug up her William,
buried the

week before, and was only prevented from
haling him
to the Mansion House by the production of
the child
with its face, fortunately, still intact. It is clear
that Crabbe
was even less made for medicine than
Keats. The idea
of being called on to do a serious operation
was a night-
mare to him; and after struggling two years
more with
his profession at Aldborough he decided to
abandon it
and take the decisive step, as it proved, of his
whole life.